

Podcasting: History's Future in the Digital Age?

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Chair and Commentator: Edward L. Ayers, University of Richmond

Panelists:

- Graham Peck, Saint Xavier University
- Edward O'Donnell, College of the Holy Cross
- Liz Covart, Omohundro Institute/Ben Franklin's World
- Nicole Hemmer, Miller Center, University of Virginia
- Julie Golia, Brooklyn Historical Society

History podcasts have arrived. iTunes lists over 200 history podcasts and professional historians produce some of those available for download. In order to stimulate conversation about the unique ability of podcasting to expand disciplinary approaches to the past and more widely disseminate historians' ideas, this session will bring together six scholars whose podcasts take different forms, reach diverse public audiences, and have varied purposes.

The participants' podcasts reflect the medium's capacious possibilities. Since 2011, Adam Smith has partnered with the BBC to broadcast historically informed programming with high production values designed to explain American history to his predominantly British audience. Liz Covart's Ben Franklin's World features weekly interviews with historians who discuss their work on early American history and how historians practice history. Remarkably, she has developed a business model around engaging conversations about historical scholarship. Nicole Hemmer's weekly podcast Past Present engages with contemporary politics and culture by focusing on breaking news and timely stories. In each episode, she moderates a discussion with fellow historians Natalia Petrzela and Neil Young, whose disparate interests, expertise, and personalities spur an entertaining exchange of views that bring historical antecedents to the fore. Similarly, Ed O'Donnell's In The Past Lane seeks to explain "why things are the way they are" in a thought-provoking but entertaining way. The podcast features interviews with historians, history thinkpieces, and analyses of portrayals of history in popular culture, such as the TV series Mercy Street. Julie Golia's Flatbush + Main is a monthly podcast from Brooklyn Historical Society. With co-host Zaheer Ali, Julie interviews scholars and analyzes oral histories and archival sources to unearth local histories with national resonance. In 2017, Graham Peck will work with Saint Xavier University's students and radio station to create podcasts on the life of Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, to illuminate and promote the charism that lies at the heart of the university's mission.

Despite its challenges, podcasting enables historians to reimagine the discipline. Its relatively low start-up costs reduce barriers to entry and enable historians to forge direct connections with listeners. The medium encourages experimentation with format. Most podcasts have multiple hosts, guests, segments, and subject matter. Podcasts also encourage creative use of evidence. Podcasts leverage the expertise of guests and hosts to distill complex problems or unknown pasts into engaging stories and analysis. Their use of music and recordings creates immersive listener experiences that appeal to broad audiences. And, most importantly, podcasts create intimate connections between historians and individual listeners, relationships historians can leverage

through the power of websites and social media. Although there are real challenges in creating successful podcasts--finding time to research, record, and edit them, acquiring and maintaining an audience, tracking and analyzing the audience, and balancing podcasting with other professional demands--podcasts are still uniquely suited to reaching new public audiences interested in history, a goal of great import for all historians.

Recorded in April 2018 at the OAH Annual Meeting held in Sacramento, California as part of the Mellon-funded Amplified Initiative.

Full Session

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